



NAACP

Maryland

STATE CONFERENCE

CHAIR; SEN. MELONY GRIFFITH

FINANCE COMMITTEE TESTIMONY TO SUPPORT

SB-804/MARCH 7, 2023

WILLIE FLOWERS; PRESIDENT

NAACP MARYLAND STATE CONFERENCE

MADAME CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE THANK FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY AND I WANT TO THANK SEN. ELLIS FOR SPONSORING THIS VERY IMPORTANT BILL.

MY NAME IS WILLIE FLOWERS AND I AM THE PRESIDENT OF THE NAACP MARYLAND STATE CONFERENCE. AS THE PRESIDENT OF A CIVIL RIGHTS ORGANIZATION I CAN SAY THAT THIS SENATE BILL-804 IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT PIECE OF LEGISLATION THAT WILL GIVE FUNDING TO EXPAND TECHNOLOGY AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL. THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT BECAUSE THERE IS A GAP OF ACCESS, TRAINING, EDUCATION AND BASIC BUILD UP FOR TECHNOLOGY IN COMMUNITIES IN THE STATE OF MARYLAND AND THE REST OF AMERICA.

SB-804 GIVES GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS THE OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD A BASE OF ACCESS OUTSIDE OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND TO CREATE THE STRUCTURE FOR A PIPELINE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO BECOME BOTH INNOVATORS AND/OR BE A VERY IMPORTANT PART OF THE TECH/CYBER WORKFORCE THAT CANNOT RELY ON STUDENTS FROM AMERICA TO FILL TECH CAREERS.

SB-804 ALLOWS FOR COMMUNITIES TO BUILD THEIR OWN SYSTEM FOR SKILL BUILDING THAT LOOKS LIKE YOUTH SPORTS. IN THAT WE CAN CREATE SEASONAL PROGRAMMING WHETHER THAT WOULD PROVIDE 10 TO 12 WEEK REPETITION IN CODING, HACKING, WEB-DESIGN, CYBER-SECURITY, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, MACHINE LEARNING, GAMING, ROBOTICS OR EVEN A BASIC INTRODUCTIONS TO TECHNOLOGY FOR ADULTS.

WHILE THE AMERICAN METHOD OF COMPETITION IS HELPFUL IT IS NOT THE ONLY WAY TO PROMOTE SKILLS. WITH SB-804 COMMUNITIES CAN DECIDE HOW BEST TO

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IMPLEMENT PROGRAMMING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL THAT WILL ORGANIZE COMMUNITIES BUT ALSO IMPLEMENT EQUITY AND ACCESS TO ALL INTERESTED RESIDENTS. THE METHOD MATTERS LESS BUT THE MISSION SHOULD BE TO CHANGE THE CURRENT WAY THE COMMUNITIES ARE INTRODUCED TO TECHNOLOGY. IN RECENT TIMES, IT INVOLVES BUYING A PHONE OR GOING TO THE GROCERY STORE AND MAKING A DECISION ABOUT THE SELF-CHECK LINE OR THE CASHIER LINE. REGARDLESS, OF HOW CITIZENS ARE INTRODUCED WE RARELY ARE CONCERNED ABOUT ACCESS TO THE LEARNING OR THE SKILL, ONLY THE NEXT STEP TO SURVIVAL AND ULTIMATELY BEING A CONSUMER FOR OUR DAILY LIVES.

SB-804 WILL CHANGE THAT REALITY AND IMPROVE UNDERSTANDING TECHNOLOGY BETTER AND ACCESS TO SKILL BUILDING MORE ACCESSIBLE. THIS BILL WILL ALSO BRING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER BY USING TRADITIONAL METHODS FOR TECHNOLOGY TO BE EMBRACED FOR CITIZENS NOT TO BE JUST RELEGATED TO BEING CONSUMERS FOR INNOVATORS AND TO BE PART OF THE EVERGROWING WORKFORCE.

AS A MEMBER OF THE NAACP MARYLAND STATE CONFERENCE AND THE HOWARD COUNTY TECH COALITION WE URGE A FAVORABLE REPORT ON SB-804.

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